

WOZ WAY PLAZA: SIGN 1

Much of San Jose's history lies in the story of its relationship with the Guadalupe River and its floodwaters. This park is a new chapter in that story.

The word "Guadalupe" in el Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe, identified the settlement's location along the Guadalupe River and distinguished it from other pueblos (towns) in the Spanish realm. From the early days of the pueblo's founding in November 1777, the 66 original pobladores (Spanish settlers) knew they had settled on fertile land. They also knew that the same river that carried rich soil down from the Santa Cruz Mountains could easily rise during heavy rains, flooding the pueblo. Despite their efforts to build dams and control the flow of water, their homes and crops were repeatedly washed out. After twenty years, in 1797, permission was finally given by the Spanish governor to relocate the pueblo to higher ground about a mile to the south.

Major floods throughout the 20th century made it clear that flood protection was essential to the city's wellbeing. Most worrisome was the likelihood of a "100-year-flood," an event that would send water flowing at 17,000 cubic feet a second through the city center (for reference, a basketball is approximately one cubic foot). A giant 60-foot-wide underground channel between here and Park Avenue is one of the primary structures engineered to handle this worst case scenario. This bypass channel diverts floodwaters from the river channel here, at Woz Way, and returns this water to the river at Park Avenue. Traditional flood-protection methods would have entailed lining the river-bed with concrete. The bypass structure protects the downtown area from flooding without disturbing the natural state of the river.